

Outreach

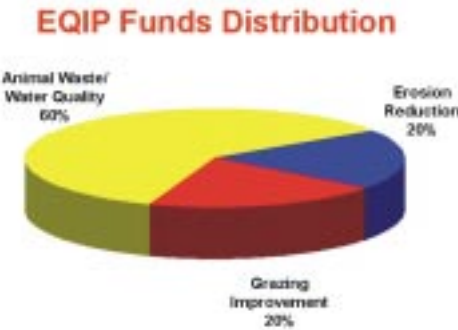
NRCS in Alabama has undertaken a major initiative to provide outreach and technical assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The overall goal of Outreach is to increase the number of small or limited resource and minority producers and directly improve their farm income. NRCS helps secure grants and enters agreements with community-based organizations and educational institutions. The dollars from these grants and agreements are used to teach these customers how to obtain and use technical assistance from USDA and other sources.

Cost-Share Programs

NRCS provides technical assistance to all 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act Programs (1996 Farm Bill). Many state agencies or non-profit organizations often look to NRCS technical assistance for their conservation cost-share programs. NRCS administers the financial assistance for these programs except the EQIP, CRP, and WRP, which are funded through the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

This voluntary conservation program addresses serious threats to soil, water, and related natural resources through 5 to 10 year contracts. There are 57 priority areas in Alabama with 2,440 conservation plans/contracts active on over 150,000 acres of land. In 2000, there have been 353 conservation plans/contracts prepared on over 36,000 acres. Sixty percent of Alabama EQIP funds went to manage animal waste and improve water quality, 20 percent to reduce erosion, and 20 percent to improve grazing. EQIP provides geographically targeted technical, financial, and educational assistance to maximize environmental benefits.



Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)

There was tremendous interest in FIP in 2000. Over 1,000 landowners applied for funding that totaled over

\$3 million. NRCS funded over 300 contracts for cost-share value of over \$970,000. Over half of the cost-share obligations were allocated from FIP disaster funds because of the high number of tree planting failures due to drought. Because of Alabama’s extreme need, \$124,000 in disaster funds was transferred from states that were not able to use all of their allotted funds.

In FY 2000, over 200 landowners applied forestry practices. Nearly 6 million trees were planted on over 8,500 acres. Timber stand improvement practices were applied on nearly 1,500 acres.

Reforestation and forestation are needed on many acres of land throughout the state. Recent droughts and southern pine beetle attacks have created an even greater need for tree planting. Timber stand improvement is also needed on many acres of forestland. Additional funds would ensure continued fiber production and ease the financial burden on private landowners.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

This voluntary program helps people develop and improve habitat for fish and wildlife on private lands. WHIP provides both technical assistance and cost-share funds through 10-year contracts. There are 171 active conservation plans on 14,584 acres of wildlife land.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

NRCS plays a very important role in CRP. NRCS staff provide technical assistance to landowners interested in enrolling land in CRP by helping them process bids, develop conservation plans, and establish permanent vegetation on environmentally sensitive cropland. In this voluntary program, landowners sign 10 to 15 year contracts and receive annual rental payments. Alabama currently has 470,000 acres enrolled in CRP with 1,700 acres in the continuous CRP. To date, 484,129 acres are covered by over 10,700 conservation planning contracts. In FY-2000, 967 conservation plans/contracts will be implemented on 39,713 acres. There are 500 conservation plans/contracts expected in continuous CRP.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

This program assists landowners that voluntarily restore and protect wetlands on private property by offering options of permanent easements, 30-year easements, and restoration cost-share agreements for a minimum of 10 years. Alabama has 10 contracts for restored wetlands. Eleven hundred eighty acres are being restored through WRP, Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program, Emergency Watershed Protection Program, and CRP.

2000 Alabama Annual Report  
Natural Resources Conservation Activities

The “Eleventh Commandment”

*“Thou shalt inherit the Holy Earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shall safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect thy hills from overgrazing by thy herds, that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land, thy fruitful fields shall become sterile stony ground and wasting gullies, and thy descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or perish from off the face of the Earth.”*

--W. C. Lowdermilk  
Former Assistant Chief  
Soil Conservation Service  
1939

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDS's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Photo by: Fay Garner







P.O. Box 311  
3381 Skyway Drive  
Auburn, Alabama 36830  
334-887-4535  
www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov/al

Dear Alabamians,

I proudly present this 2000 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) annual report to you, the shareholders of Alabama's soil and water resources.

Alabama's private landowners continue to respond to the soil and water resource challenges facing them. Each year gains in natural resources conservation take us closer to our goal of maintaining a productive land in harmony with a quality environment.

These strides are made because of landowner commitment along with assistance from a broadbased conservation partnership consisting of NRCS, Alabama Association of Conservation Districts, Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee, and the Alabama Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils. This partnership has reaffirmed its commitment to locally led conservation as one of the most effective ways to help individual landowners and communities achieve their conservation goals through a voluntary, incentive-based approach to land stewardship.

This has been a banner year in resource conservation, but there is still much to be accomplished. I invite you to read this report, get to know us better, and determine your role in conserving Alabama's natural resources.

Many thanks to Alabama's NRCS employees, conservation partnership members, and private landowners who are dedicated to conservation work that is so vital to all Alabamians.

Sincerely,

ROBERT N. JONES  
State Conservationist

### NRCS Mission

To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment.

### NRCS Vision

A Productive Nation in Harmony with a Quality Environment.

## NRCS Provides Excellent Customer Service

Jerry Lacey is among the many Alabama landowners who have benefited from NRCS assistance. In 1982, he bought a 187-acre farm close to his boyhood home. In 1986, he began looking for ways to make it profitable and to create an environment where his family could relax and enjoy nature.

Lacey contacted the Natural Resources Conservation Service for a conservation plan. In the mid-1990's, his interest in forestry and wildlife escalated, resulting in a plan that led to his becoming a TREASURE Forest Landowner in 1999.

One of the programs used to improve the farm was the Forestry Incentives Program, (FIP). He hopes to



continue using the program to improve his forestland and his profit margin. The profits from his forestland will be used to maintain existing walking trails, create new trails, improve an old cabin for family use, and create other recreational opportunities.

Lacey is only one of the many FIP success stories in Alabama. He is an excellent role model for forest landowners by increasing interest in good forest management and promoting the programs available. "I'm grateful to NRCS for all the help and motivation they have provided," said Lacey. "They provide excellent assistance to landowners in helping us care for our land."

**NRCS** employees serve all 67 counties from 56 field offices across the state. Fifty-five district conservationists lead the NRCS team within each of the conservation districts. Staffs are comprised of resource and soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, soil conservation and engineering technicians, and water management specialists. These employees work hand-in-hand with land users to conserve natural resources on private lands.

## Program Summary

This annual report covers the fiscal year, from October 1, 1999, to September 30, 2000. The following are highlights of our activities.

### Small Watershed Program

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, Public Law 83-566 (Small Watershed Program) provides broad authority to USDA agencies and other federal and state agencies to cooperate in watershed planning, surveys, and investigations. NRCS works with the conservation districts as local sponsors of watershed projects.

NRCS uses the Small Watershed Program to map flood hazard areas, reduce local flooding problems, develop guidelines for erosion control and runoff management, help landowners control erosion in high priority watersheds, and improve water quality in water bodies and groundwater.

During FY2000, NRCS provided \$472,735 in financial assistance to build seven structures in seven different watersheds. In addition, NRCS obligated \$189,622 through long-term contracts in five other watersheds.

### Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

When a major storm event occurs, NRCS assembles an emergency team to travel to disaster areas and offer assistance. During the past 3 years, almost \$22 million in EWP funds helped Alabama communities rebuild and recover from numerous natural disasters.

### Soil Surveys

Currently, modern soil surveys are available in 35 of the 67 counties in Alabama. Four counties (Choctaw, Marengo, Pickens, and Russell) have an interim report completed and awaiting publication. Mapping is complete in one county (Macon) and the manuscript is being written. Six counties have on-going surveys (Barbour, Clarke, Coosa, Crenshaw, Hale, and Tallapoosa). Five Counties (Bibb, Lamar, Lowndes, Washington, and Winston) do not have soil surveys. Sixteen counties have out-of-date or out-of-print soil surveys.

Eighteen soil surveys in Alabama are SSURGO certified, meeting all standards and specifications as

described in the NRCS National Soil Survey Handbook. Choctaw County is in the certification process with another five (Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, and Houston) to start in 2001. Marengo County is digitally map finished and awaiting publication. Pickens County is digitally map finished and awaiting final review. Digital layers (roads, hydrology, and cultural) are being developed for Russell and Macon Counties for digital map finishing. Marengo is one of the first counties to have soils data available on CD-ROM.

### Private Grazing Land Assistance

NRCS is a member of the Alabama Forage and Grassland Coalition that promotes forage quality and grazing management. The Coalition has sponsored grazing schools and a forage conference to teach grazing management. More than 150 people have attended 4 sessions of the grazing school.

### Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)

During FY 2000, \$2 million in ECP funds were allocated to help farmers in drought stricken areas of Alabama.

### Conservation Tillage

Conservation tillage, defined as 30 percent residue cover after planting, is the cornerstone of conservation systems in Alabama. The number of farmers using this conservation practice continues to increase as farmers observe the success of their neighbors in using the environmentally friendly practice. A recent survey is expected to show that conservation tillage has increased 45 percent from the 1998 rate of 35 percent of crops being grown using this method in Alabama.

### Conservation Buffers

As of July 2000, Alabama landusers have installed 40,000 acres in conservation buffers of grass and trees. Buffers help improve water quality in lakes and streams. Nationally, NRCS's goal is to have 2 million miles or 7.2 million acres of buffers by the year 2002. Alabama is well on the way to reaching the goal of 104,000 acres or 373,000 miles.

### Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Program

RC&D is a unique USDA program that helps rural areas promote wise use of natural resources, improve communities, and stimulate economic development. NRCS administers the program, providing a coordinator and administrative support. A local council of citizens set their own priorities.

This past year, about three percent of the priority projects were funded through RC&D, and the remaining were funded through outside sources.